

Being wasteful feeders much of what they obtain falls to the ground half chewed and is eagerly consumed by the numerous impala gathered below. In January and February the fruit of *Phoenix reclinata* Jacq. are fully mature and provided the growth of the palm is not too dense, baboon clamber up and once more their wasteful feeding habits provide the patiently waiting impala with a further variation to their diet.

The association has a second and incidental benefit to the impala. The area in which this commensalistic relationship takes place is one of heavy undergrowth which, under normal circumstances, is not the preferred habitat of impala and one which they are inclined to avoid for fear of predators. This drawback, however, is negated by the baboon who are normally the first to give warning of the presence of predators. When this happens the baboons make for the topmost branches of the nearest trees and the impala flee to more open country.

(Received 26th June, 1960)

PAINTED SNIPE OBSERVATIONS

By

HENRY H. WILLIAMS

During the past few weeks I have been able to observe the habits of a female Painted Snipe, *Rostratula benghalensis* (Linnæus), a brief account of which may add to the comparatively scant recorded knowledge of this solitary and little known bird.

The Painted Snipe is of singular interest in that it is the only species occurring in the African continent of the family *Rostratulidae*, the other being found in South America. It is also unusual in its colouration, for the female is the brightly plumaged member of the pair, her chestnut head, neck and throat, white eye-stripe and belly, and green-glossed olive-brown upper parts contrasting strongly with the more sombre plumage of her mate; in addition she is larger than her partner, is believed to be polyandrous and is the dominant member in courtship, even to the extent of fighting with other females for the favours of the male—a characteristic which is shared only by a few other birds, notably the phalaropes and jacanas.

Praed and Grant (Vol. 1 p. 370) makes no mention of the Painted Snipe being a nocturnal feeder but this now seems likely from my observations. Throughout the three weeks period of study, the bird remained within the deep shade and protection of dense water-side herbage during daylight hours, occupying the same "roost"—a branch submerged in water—on the many occasions that visits were made to the site. Owing to the closely packed vegetation in which it rested, observation of the bird was difficult, the inverted black horseshoe on its chest and pronounced white eye patches being the only well-defined identifying features during the daytime.

As sunset approached, the bird was observed to indulge in a considerable amount of wing and leg stretching—a further likely indication that it roosts continuously during daylight hours—and also preening of its underparts, which had possibly become water-soiled during its roosting.

Regularly, between 18.45 hours and 19.00 hours, when the sun had gone below the hills, the bird left its shelter, showing considerable suspicion and wariness in the process. A sudden disturbance or noise caused by other feeding waders or a pair of Crowned Cranes, *Balearica regulorum gibbericeps* Reichenow, which were constantly

feeding nearby, would send it scuttering back into its sanctuary. If all was quiet, it would begin its feeding, probing much in the manner of the snipes, but it was noticeable that its movements were always accompanied by a nervous fore-and-aft bobbing movement of its body.

When flushed from its roost, it flew in a characteristically sluggish, rail-like fashion with its pale olive-green legs hanging almost vertically beneath its body. It flew only a short distance to other dense herbage but within a timed half-an-hour had returned by stealthy movements through the reeds and grasses to its original roosting place.

At one time, it occurred to me that a male might be sitting on eggs in the vicinity—but it being known that the female takes little or no part in such domestic activities—but careful search failed to reveal a nest. However, these birds are recorded as being unusually close sitters, so there may be a nest, and as the young of this species has never been accurately described, my patient watch will be continued during the next few weeks.

THE CHESTNUT-BANDED PLOVER AT LAKE MANYARA, NORTHERN TANGANYIKA

By

A. M. MORGAN-DAVIES

(*Park Warden, Lake Manyara.*)

From the account by Praed and Grant (1957), the breeding records of the Chestnut-Banded Plover, *Charadrius venustus* Fischer & Reichenow, are confined to Lake Magadi, Kenya Colony. In fact, owing possibly to this apparent single recorded breeding area, the species has acquired the subsidiary name of the Lake Magadi Plover.

An extension to the breeding records of this species must now be made to include Lake Manyara, Northern Tanganyika. Apart from being quite plentiful almost throughout the year, it has been recorded breeding during 1959 and 1960. On the 11th August, 1959, I watched a fledgling emerge from a clutch of two eggs on the eastern shore of the lake. In 1960 numerous fledglings were seen during July, August and September. During these months Chestnut-Banded Plovers are definitely more numerous, which may indicate the possibility of a local seasonal movement up and down the Rift Valley between Kenya and Tanganyika.

Between 11.10 a.m. and 12 noon on the 23rd July, 1960, I watched a pair of these birds nest building, courting and copulating. The male bird was noted first hollowing out a nest site with its feet and wings. While he was doing this, the female made periodic visits to see how he was progressing, on each occasion ejecting him from the nest and trying it out for size. After the third visit by the female, the male approached her from the rear and, after about four to six very pronounced "goose steps" just by her tail, hopped on to her back. With a firm grip on the back of the female he copulated for a few seconds and then fell over backwards pulling the female over with him. In this upside down attitude they remained for a few seconds before regaining their feet.

It is interesting to note that Barry (1960) noted a very similar courting and copulating pattern in a pair of Kittlitz' Plovers in South Africa.

References

1957. MACKWORTH-PRAED AND GRANT: "Birds of Eastern and North-Eastern Africa."
1960. BARRY, D. H.; *Bokmakierie*; Vol. 12, No. 1.

(Received October, 1960)